

The right call in a complex world

Authors 2000
BOOK REVIEW: Drawing on far-reaching career, Capitola author offers framework for decisions

By **JASON HOPPIN**

jhoppin@santacruzsentinel.com

CAPITOLA — Seems wherever Capitola resident Vince Barabba has been in life, he has had data and some idea what to do with it.

From the executive offices of Fortune 100 companies to recently helping shape the state's new political districts as a member of California's citizen redistricting commission, Barabba has always strived to understand problems, gather information and figure out how to make good decisions. He recently compiled those observations into his latest book, "The Decision Loom," presenting a framework for how

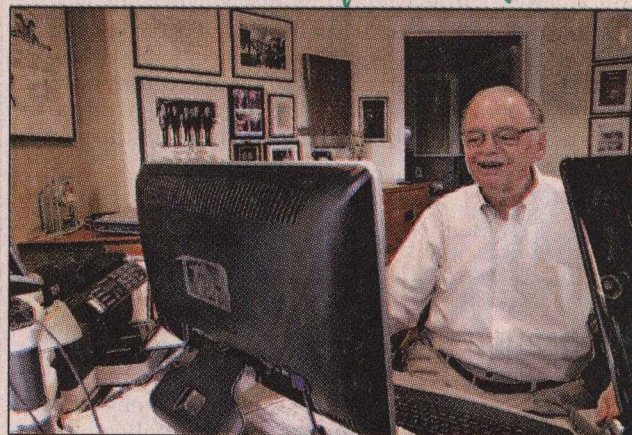
organizations can produce results in a fast-moving, rapidly-changing world.

"If an enterprise in and of itself doesn't have a mindset that it's willing to adapt to change and accept the fact that it's going to be different — if you don't have that mindset, no matter how clever you are, the organization is not going to do well," Barabba, 77, said recently over coffee.

"The Decision Loom" owes much to the organizational and management theories of Russell Ackoff, Peter Drucker and others. With a background in marketing, Barabba is also driven by data, and early in his career was among the first to develop and apply market research and analysis to political campaigns.

Barabba's quest for data (and his skill in handling it) also led to him twice to being named to head the U.S. Census Bureau, and he oversaw the 1980 Census. He applied those skills during stops at Xerox, Eastman Kodak and General Motors, the latter during a time when GM saw increased competition from foreign automakers, was near bankruptcy (a place to which it would return) and faced what amounted to a corporate identity crisis.

In those companies, Barabba sees both victories (the development of GM's popular OnStar navigation system) and lost



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Vince Barabba spends Monday afternoon in the office of his Capitola home.

SEE **BOOK** ON B3

BOOK

Continued from B1

opportunities (Kodak's slow reaction to the digital camera revolution, something its own researchers warned was coming).

"We all grew up in an envi-

ronment of the last of the 20th century. ... If you had a good idea of what happened in the last four or five years, you had a really good idea of what could happen in the next two or three," Barabba said. "Today, if you're trying to figure out what's going to happen tomorrow, don't look at the last two days, because it's

going to be different."

The book is more a manual than memoir, though Barabba does share corporate insights. He stresses that there is no one right way to do things, but outlines four needed "capabilities" for good organizational decisions: openness, holistic thinking, adaptability and interactive decision-making

using a variety of tools.

The computer age has produced a wealth of information, from geographically based demographic statistics to hyper-detailed consumer habits. "The Decision Loom" offers some hope for sifting through that information and finding ways to use it before it overwhelms us.